MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF A MELANISTIC SPOTTED DEER *AXIS AXIS* (ERXLEBEN) IN PARAMBIKULAM TIGER RESERVE, KERALA, INDIA

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In July 2009, while on patrol duty from the Kerala Forest department's boat in Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, I sighted a herd of Spotted Deer *Axis axis* along the shore of the reservoir. Suddenly, I spotted a very dark animal in the herd, which seemed to be dominant and 'leading' the herd. Without wasting time much time, I took out and used the longest possible zoom lens to have a close-up view of the animal, and saw that it resembled a Spotted Deer except for its jet black coat colour. I managed to take a few photographs of it till it retreated back into bamboo thickets.

Later, while enlarging the images in the camera, I could see the typical spots of a Spotted Deer hidden under the black coat of the animal. This is perhaps the first (photographic) record of a melanistic Spotted Deer in the wild.

2. SUNBASKING BEHAVIOUR OF ELLIOT'S GIANT FLYING SQUIRREL *PETAURISTA PHILIPPENSIS* (ELLIOT) IN SITAMATA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

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The Elliot's Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista philippensis* (Elliot), a nocturnal species is distributed in the southern and some western states of India (Nandini 2001a, b; Prater 1971). The species has been studied by Bhatnagar *et al.* (2010a, b), Chundawat *et al.* (2002), Koli *et al.* (2011), Sharma (2007), and Tehsin (1980) in Rajasthan. However, these authors have not reported sun basking in this species. In this note, we report sun basking behaviour observed in the species in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary (24° 04'–24° 23' N; 74° 25'–74° 40' E) is situated in Pratapgarh district of Rajasthan state. Teak is the dominant tree species in the Sanctuary, but the valleys have Mahuwa *Madhuca indica*, Charoli *Buchanania lanzan*, Shadad *Terminalia tomentosa*, Bahera *T. bellirica*, and Mango *Mangifera indica*. In winter, the temperature in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary drops to as low as 4 °C. Terrain of the Sanctuary is hilly and rugged with a number of deep valleys and gorges. Due to the low temperature, the air becomes chilled and heavy and accumulates in the deepest parts of the valleys or at ground level. Frost is not uncommon in the area, especially during mid-December to mid-February.

The valley groves of Mahuwa in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary are commonly inhabited by the Elliot's Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista philippensis* (Elliot) (Koli 2012; Sharma 2007).

On January 12, 2012, at about 11:00 hrs, while studying the biodiversity of Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary near Arampura forest outpost, we saw a basking flying squirrel clinging on a nearly horizontal well-lighted thick branch of a Mahuwa tree. It was motionless in the flat posture keeping its dorsa exposed to the sun. The same behaviour was noticed again on January 13, 2012. Being nocturnal, the Elliot's Giant Flying Squirrel retires into its hollows before sunrise. However, since they probably feel the discomfort of low temperature in the hollows due to the presence of chilled air, the squirrels sometimes peep out to take warmth of the sun as the air becomes warm. Sometimes, they completely emerge and settle down on a bough, to bask in the sunlight. Their black dorsum helps them to absorb the heat of the sun. The Elliot's Giant Flying Squirrel has been reported resting outside its hollows during hot days in summer in Rajasthan (Bhatnagar *et al.* 2010b), but there have been no reports of basking in the sun in winter till our record. Sun basking in winter is known in the Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*. Sitamata WLS has thick forest sanctuary and very less quantum of light reaches on ground in the valley during the day. Thus, temperature remains low not only during the night but also during the day, especially during winter. Hence, the low temperature conditions compel this nocturnal animal to emerge from its hollow for thermoregulation through basking.

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3. USE OF PALM FRONDS FOR NEST SITES BY THE NORTHERN PALM SQUIRREL *FUNAMBULUS PENNANTII* WROUGHTON

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The Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* Wroughton is a common squirrel in northern India (Gurung and Singh 1996; Menon 2003; Prakash 1994). At night, it takes shelter in small cavities in trees, crevices in walls, and sometimes uses letter boxes and electric meter boxes in houses (Prakash 1994). The female prefers tree holes and cavities in walls for placing nests (Roberts 1997).

However, on June 5, 2008, I recorded an active nest of *F. pennantii* placed on the upper surface of a slanting frond of a Chinese Palm *Livistona chinensis* (Fig. 1) in Gulab Bagh Zoo, Udaipur. The to and fro movements of the female were visible, and also the vocalization of the infants. The nest was cylindrical with a tapering entrance, the shape due to conduplication of the palm leaf which resulted in an open tunnel-like space in the middle of the fan-like frond of the palm. Conduplication is a natural 'folding' in palm leaves which provide space for nesting. The cavity formed by conduplication was occupied by the squirrel for her nest.

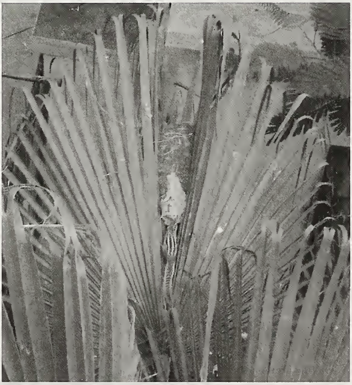

Fig. 1: A female Northern Palm Squirrel close to her epifoliar nest